

Avid listening

Avid's latest Sequel SP turntable leaves us wondering if vinyl replay can get any better, says *Jimmy Hughes*...



DETAILS

- PRODUCT:**
Avid Sequel SP
- ORIGIN:** UK
- TYPE:** 2-speed belt-drive turntable
- WEIGHT:**
12.6kg
- DIMENSIONS:**
(WxHxD)
425x370x205mm
- FEATURES:**
- 3.5cm thick alloy platter
 - threaded record clamp
 - variable speed control PSU
 - suspended subchassis
 - supplied with cut-out for SME arm, others are available
- DISTRIBUTOR:**
Avid Hi-Fi
- TELEPHONE:**
01480 869900
- WEBSITE:**
avidhifi.co.uk

Avid currently offers no fewer than six high-end turntables. Only Six? Actually it's seven if you include its hugely-expensive limited-edition Anniversary model. Now, just a mo; isn't that a wee bit excessive? Can there really be that much difference to justify such a

broad range? Happily, the answer appears to be yes. For while the less expensive Avid models perform extremely well, high-end vinyl replay is an almost bottomless pit...

You can always squeeze a bit more out of your records, or so it seems. And that's what makes LP such a fascinating medium. It's the gift

that just keeps giving – it keeps surprising you, getting better.

To be strictly accurate, there are just three basic models in Avid's turntable range, with standard and 'turbo-charged' versions, and upgrading possible. Thus, the £5,500 Sequel SP is the turbo version of the Volvere SP



In the grand scheme of things, the Sequel SP sits below Avid's flagship Acutus SP and Reference SP models, and the maker claims it offers a real taste of these exceptional turntables at a far more affordable price.

I actually reviewed the original Sequel as long ago as 2002 (*HFC* 229) and was mightily impressed by its combination of crisp clean clarity, and outstanding solidity and precision. Those interested can still find this review on Avid's website.

Since then, Avid has improved the design in a number of important areas. Naturally, the basic qualities that made the original so good are retained. But now, added authority and subtlety bring performance levels closer to the Acutus.

The Sequel SP might not be Avid's finest turntable, but it's doubtful you'll notice anything lacking. Hearing it in isolation, you may well speculate on whether or not it could possibly be improved on.

I certainly felt that way about the original Sequel.

And while hearing the Acutus demonstrated that further improvements were indeed possible, sonically the Sequel more than held its own.

Now the Sequel has evolved into the Sequel SP, Avid has been compelled to improve the Acutus to, no

doubt, justify the higher price of its flagship model.

The Sequel SP features a rigid base that supports a suspended subchassis. It's very simple and straightforward. There's nothing fancy, nothing clever-for-its-own-sake, about the design.

Its outstanding performance is the result of solid engineering, allied to the careful choice of high-quality materials. There's no attempt to reinvent the wheel, or introduce flashy innovations for their own sake.

Build quality is very good and the finish superb. Everything feels solid and built to last. While not quite the heaviest deck around, the weight and construction are confidence-building and impressive.

The alloy platter weighs in at around 6.7kg, and runs on an inverted stainless steel bearing shaft with a tungsten carbide and sapphire bearing. The mat is fixed and made from cork. A screw-down record clamp is included.

The platter is driven via two short round belts from a modified 24-pole AC synchronous motor. The motor is quite powerful and produces plenty of torque; something that creates the musical impression of drive.

The Avid-designed outboard power supply unit provides variable speeds of 33 and 45rpm. It borrows technology developed for the Acutus' PSU, and the company claims the result is a significant improvement in sound quality.

Those who want LP to sound like SACD in terms of neutrality, will find the SP exceptional

The three-point sprung suspension has a vertical resonance of around 3Hz. This provides excellent isolation from transmitted noise, while not leaving the subchassis too floppy and excessively decoupled.

Although quite free to move vertically, the subchassis is surprisingly well-controlled in terms of lateral movement. Three fairly stiff rubber O-rings help centre it, and damp excessive sideways motion.

Avid supplies its turntables with fixings for SME tonearms as standard, and our review Sequel SP came fitted with an SME IV. This matches the turntable sonically, as well as finish and build quality. The Sequel SP is definitely a form-follows-function design. Assembly and adjustment are simple and straightforward. Once set up, performance does not drift. It's definitely not a deck that needs constant tweaking.

Sound quality

The Sequel SP offers outstanding stability. On a well-pressed LP, it delivers rock-solid results that rival CD for pitch accuracy and security. There's no hint of waver; if there is, check the record! Individual listeners vary in their ability to identify pitch waver, some being more sensitive than others. But – even those not conscious of such things – register its absence subliminally. There's a sense of total security.

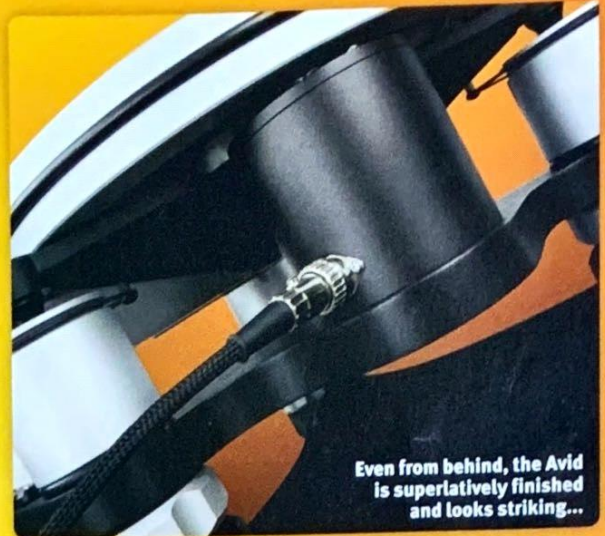
Voices and instruments retain greater separation and individuality. Not only is the stereo soundstage wider, broader, and deeper but the placement of images in space seems noticeably more solid and precise.

Musically, the Sequel SP sounds impressively integrated and cohesive, with lots of fine detail and a wide

dynamic range. Individual timbral qualities of specific voices and instruments are well preserved.

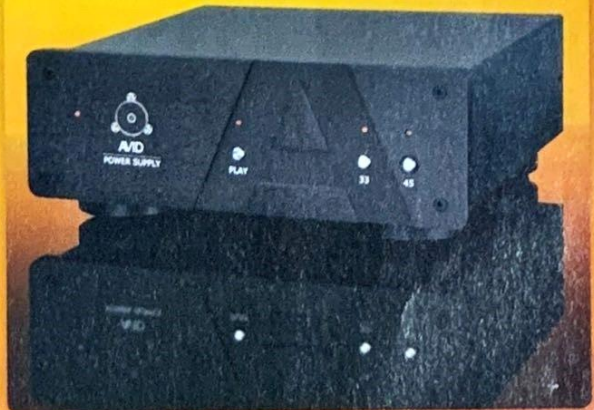
In other words, things don't sound the same all the time. Although the basic musical presentation is crisp and immediate, there's plenty of fine dynamic shading and subtle tonal colour to be heard.

Bass is super-solid and powerful. This was one area where the Acutus scored over the original Sequel.



Even from behind, the Avid is superlatively finished and looks striking...

Offboard DSP varispeed control unit and power supply...



...one of three beautifully hewn, height-adjustable support legs

Q&A

JIMMY HUGHES SPEAKS WITH
AVID'S CONRAD MAS



JMH: How has the Sequel changed since I reviewed it back in 2003?

CM: There have been quite a few changes. We made the platter thicker, and went over to a stainless steel main bearing. We've also made some improvements to the suspension system. Apart from better sound and isolation, we wanted to make adjustment easier, so we put larger O-rings around the suspension housings, which made it operate much more smoothly.

Next came the big SP upgrade. SP signifies variable fine-speed (SP-peed) control. We achieved this using DSP (Digital Signal Processing) to create a near-perfect sine wave. Varying the frequency of the sine wave alters the speed of the motor. In terms of consistency, it's super-accurate; far more so than any of the various DC options out there. In addition, the PSU noise floor is greatly reduced, and motor torque increased.

Using twin drive belts helps transfer all the torque from the motor, so it really controls the platter. Start-up time is now very fast, and belt life considerably increased. But more importantly, sound quality has taken a huge leap forward. And it's not just me saying this. Our customers are telling us, too. Bass dynamics are much better defined, and the deep bass goes lower. At the same time, the top and middle seem to have grown more holographic and three-dimensional; getting that bit closer to our state-of-the-art Acutus.

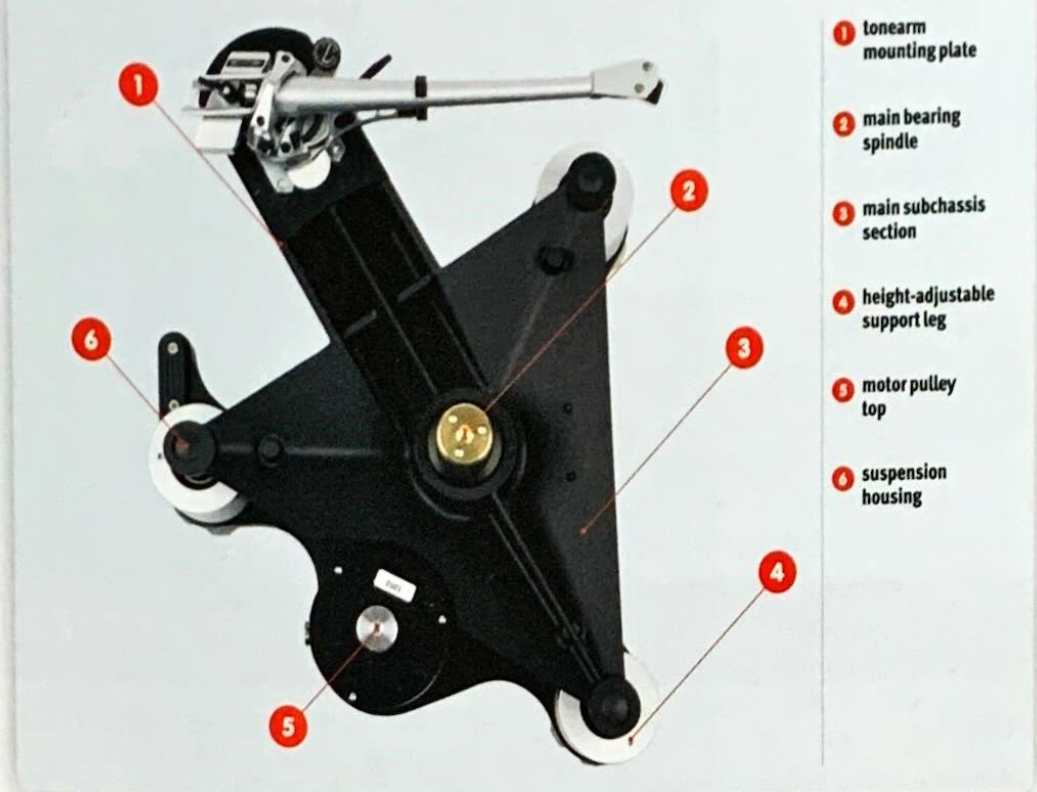
Your various designs almost seem to feed off one another?

Yes. Just recently we gave our Volvere model a totally separate PSU with larger transformer. We also made the main chassis solid.

Lastly, which of your turntables represents the 'best buy' of the current Avid range?

I've said for years that the Sequel gives the biggest bang for your buck. However, our best-sellers are the cheaper Diva and Volvere models. After that, people seem to jump to the Acutus. While I'm not complaining, this puzzles me, as the Sequel SP is in the same price range as an SME 20, which is their best-seller.

IN SIGHT



- 1 tonearm mounting plate
- 2 main bearing spindle
- 3 main subchassis section
- 4 height-adjustable support leg
- 5 motor pulley top
- 6 suspension housing



PERHAPS THE MOST significant design aspect of the Sequel SP, compared to most rivals, is the fact that it has a sprung subchassis. Many similar decks favour a 'solid' type construction. Thus the Avid is better isolated from external shock than most competitors. However, this does not come at the expense of stability; the Sequel SP is as good as vinyl gets in terms of outright pitch stability.

Some rival designs, like the Claro Clarity Dual, offer users the opportunity to use two tonearms – very handy if you're comparing pickups! But for most of us, this is not really a deal-breaker.

Once you reach this sort of price level, choice is very subjective, and performance differences are a matter of swings and roundabouts. If you can't happily live with a deck of Sequel SP quality you're exceptionally fussy, and probably a lost cause! Still, do try to get a nice long audition if you can.

This latest Sequel SP now seems to offer greater weight and overall authority than before, rivalling its bigger brother.

Although it's important to audition turntables using LPs that are well cut and well-recorded, sometimes it's more instructive to play something average. Thus, I sampled the Sequel SP on the Walker Brothers' *Greatest Hits*. Hi-fi it ain't. Yet played on the Sequel SP, the sound was amazingly full and rich, with excellent depth and space.

The bass line was surprisingly firm and full, and did not seem lacking in any way. The sound proved remarkably holographic, and an impressively three-dimensional soundstage was created. Thus, a very 'ordinary' LP was utterly transformed.

Conclusion

Such exceptional clarity and stability soon makes you forget you're listening to flawed, fallible vinyl records. Surface noise is very low, and (given a suitable cartridge), tracking is extremely secure.

Many listeners today seem unfazed by surface noise. A bit of crackle and pop is almost welcome; if anything it reminds you you're listening to vinyl, and not 'pure perfect' CD. It's akin to having film grain in a photographic image...

But is it? For audiophiles of a certain age, ultra-clean quiet vinyl reproduction was very much the Holy Grail. We dreamed of a turntable that made our LPs sound like master

tapes. If that's still your ideal, then check out the Sequel SP.

Those who want LPs to sound like CD and/or SACD in terms of neutrality and clarity will find the Sequel SP exceptional. It allows you to experience the best vinyl has to offer, while minimising most of the downsides. LPs on the Sequel SP exhibit a free, airy, spacious clarity you never get from silver disc. The precision and focus of CD is there, but without that dry and clinical quality you also get.

Suitably partnered, it promises a winning combination of focus and immediacy, coupled with delicacy and finesse that's very beguiling. So much so, it can be difficult to listen to the Sequel SP. It sounds so natural and truthful, your attention is immediately grabbed by the music and performance – indeed you almost forget it's there. ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ | LIKE: Powerful, solid, stable sound; build; finish |
| VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ | DISLIKE: Not cheap (but worth every penny) |
| BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ | WE SAY: A worthy upgrade – and one of the best turntables around. It's not inexpensive, but you can buy the cheaper Volvere SP and upgrade later... |
| FEATURES
★★★★★ | |

OVERALL

